RESEARCH PLAN PROPOSAL

Human concern about the earth, environment and living creatures in contemporary American and British poetry

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Research Problem

Ecopoetry features the characteristics of establishing a balanced human-nature relationship, preserving the natural world against mechanical exploitation. It studies the human exploitation of the natural world. It has come into popular use as a means of denoting poetry with a strong ecological emphasis or message. It deals with the variety of significant ideas about human-human relationships and human-nature relationships.

In my thesis, I propose to analyze the works of contemporary American ecopoets like Cynthia Hogue, James Wright, Robert Hass and contemporary British ecopoets like Alice Oswald, Geoffrey Hill, Blake Morrison, Mary Oliver and Ted Hughes. I will explore the kind of poetic forms these poets employ in their representation of nature. I will examine the term, ecopoetry in detail and the development of ecopoetics and examine the manner in which ecological and environmental concerns are reflected in their poetry and will also explore the themes, subjects taken by these poets and their approach towards ecological issues.

The chief questions I will investigate are: Exactly what is Ecopoetry? Has the emphasis on ecological issues made a difference to modern poetry? What is the value of ecopoetry? How ecopoetry has enriched the literature?

I hypothesize that when the environmental and ecological issues are brought together to poetry, it gives a new shape to it. This kind of poetry is crucial, urgent and relevant to today's world and will have a lasting impact on the society as health and beauty of culture are ultimately inseparable from those of nature. I also hypothesize the speaking of the

natural world cannot do without acknowledging its decline at the hands of humanity.

In testing my hypothesis, I will compare and contrast selected poems and articles, their deep impact on the minds of people and on the society. I will consider the responses of the people and the critics.

Definition of terms

Ecopoetry: It is dedicated to explore the creative–critical edges between writing and ecology. It is not poetry simply about nature but is about ecological crises and a search for ways to use language to better appreciate or understand the interconnectedness of human, animal, mind, matter and nature.

Ecology: Ecology is an interdisciplinary branch of biology which studies life and interaction of people with their environment.

Ecocriticism: It is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation. In the context of poetry it takes a different dimension as it looks from the perspective of human eyes.

Ecofeminism: It is the social movement that regards the oppression of women and nature as interconnected. It is a joining of environmental, feminist and women's spirituality concerns.

Background

Ecopoetry is defined differently from critic to critic, but there exist some common features. Ecopoetry differs from traditional nature poetry due to its ecological concerns with environmental issues. The theme of traditional nature poetry is nature or an expression of one's feelings about nature. In a traditional nature poem, the persona or the poet is the dominator and the nature serves the poet but ecopoetry goes beyond traditional nature poetry to take on distinctly contemporary issues, recognizing the interdependence of all life on earth, wildness and otherness of nature and the irresponsibility of our attempts to tame and plunder nature. The poem reflects upon the dangers and poverty of the modern world ruled by technology, self interest and economic power.

The term itself is variously interpreted, and a precise definition does not exist; however, as a means of describing poetry that embrace the ecological imperative for personal sensitivity and social change, ecopoetry has now moved squarely into current use, and is cited freely across the literature.

Review of literature

In 1999 appeared Leonard Scigaj's *Sustainable Poetry: Four Ecopoets.* It is the first book to take ecopoetry as its primary subject. It is a thoughtful and meticulous study of Wendell Berry, A.R. Ammons, W.S. Merwin and Gary Snyder. The book believes that language is a positive instrument that can promote authentic social and environmental relations between humans and their environment–relations that can lead to emancipatory social change.

The following year Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth* examined a wealth of world literature in light of what he presented as "ecopoetics."

Bate traces the distinctions among "nature," "culture," and "environment" and shows how their meanings have changed since their appearance in the literature of the eighteenth century. It is at once an essential history of environmental consciousness and an impassioned argument for the necessity of literature in a time of ecological crisis. Poetry dissolves the boundaries between the disconnected human mind and the natural world, dissolves the opposition between human interests and the "interests" of nature. The literature of national identity gives way, in poetry, to the literature of regions, locales, ecosystems.

Earth Shattering: Ecopoems is the firth anthology to show the full range of the ecopoetry, from the wilderness poetry of ancient China to 21st century Native American poetry with post colonial and feminist perspective. Its words of warning include contributions from many great writers of the past as well as leading contemporary poets from around the world, ranging from Hopkins, Hardy, Rilke to Helen Dunmore, Denise Levertov and Gary Snyder.

Terry Gilford's *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* and John Elder's *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* are excellent works and have provided some critical underpinnings for my research. The texts provide a good look at British nature poetry and seeks to discover what different notions of nature actually underlie contemporary poetry and how they relate to traditional assumptions about "nature" in the poetry of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England.

In 1997, Gyorgyi Voros published *Notations of the Wild: Ecology in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* and employed contemporary environmental theory to argue for "an ecological poetic."

Ecofeminism

The term ecofeminism is believed to be used initially in 1974. It is the social movement that regards the oppression of women and nature as interconnected. Ecofeminist theorists have extended their analysis to consider the interactions between sexism, domination of nature and also racism and social inequalities. It is joining of environmental, feminist and women's spirituality concerns. As the environmental movement along with environmental crises raises the consciousness of women to the decay of earth, feminists began to see a parallel between the devaluation of earth and devaluation of women. Women have been associated with nature, metaphorically as in 'mother earth' for instance. Historically, women have had no real power in the outside world, no place in decision making. They have been generally passive, as has been nature.

Dr. Vandana Shiva is a woman whose work is focused on embracing not only the principles of feminism, but also the principles of ecology. In fact, as an ecofeminist, she sees these two movements as interconnected and believes that the worldview that causes environmental degradation and injustice is the same worldview that causes a culture of male domination, exploitation, and inequality for women.

I have analyzed the traditional nature poetry and the contemporary American and British ecopoetry. In traditional poetry, nature is one of the major themes. It is beautiful and peaceful and is a kind of religion for William Wordsworth in which he has the utmost faith. Nature is one of the greatest sources of inspiration for John Keats. I have analyzed the poetic works by Wordsworth like "Daffodils", "One Summer Evening" and Keats's poems as "Ode to a Nightingale" and "To Autumn."

In the contemporary times, in regard to nature and environmental issues, poetry has conveyed perspectives and values about the needs of people to preserve their natural surroundings. In contemporary poetry, the splendor of nature again emerges as poetics. However, different from the previous poetic tradition, the contemporary poetry put forward nature not just as an image but also conveys some criticisms towards environmental problems. As a social and aesthetic product, poetry can play a role in building people's views.

I have analyzed Dave smith's "Rain Forest." The poem has played a role in encouraging people's understanding and awareness of the threatened condition of our natural surroundings. It describes the decay of the forest due to exploitative and destructive logging practices.

Beginning from the title, the poem has already described some scenes of environment as a part of our natural ecology. The poet recounts his experience and impression about the rain forest that seems to deteriorate because of some logging practices in the forest. The poet feels distressed and dismayed with the decaying parts of the forest. The poem describes the destruction of a tree that has been disfigured, getting thick and black because of the practices.

"That tree there bore the same slithering of light from a sky he owned. Disfigured now, its trunk rises thick and black as a monument that rings when struck"

The poem lamentingly recounts the effects of logging practices on the deteriorating living of trees. The image 'distant and precise taps of the mallet' appeals to sense of sound and movement. It suggests human activity in making use of timbers in the forest in excessive quantity so that the leaves or trees are getting decreased and the light shines feebly on the remnants of the logged trees.

“and the feckless light fixes us on the column of our spines”

Human’s logging practices and removal of the plant cover insignificant quantity, leads to impoverished soils of the forest and it consequently causes erosion and land slide.

Deforestation that occurs in the rain forests is one of the environmental problems that exacerbate the sustainability of living organisms- humans, vegetation and animals.

I have also analyzed Elizabeth Bishop’s “At the Fishhouses.” It is a long poem giving a description of the atmosphere and the fishes. It talks about an old man who has been catching fishes for years and there is blood all around because of killing of the fishes. The water is described as ‘clear’ making the readers aware of the decline in marine life.

“Cold dark deep and absolutely clear,

The clear gray icy water…”

Overfishing is also one of the environmental problems and many coastal fisheries have already become over exploited.

Gary Snyder is an environmentalist and a contemporary American poet. He’s not only important as a writer about environmental issues, but also as a prototype for modern environmental activism because he strives with his writing to redefine the ways in which nature is popularly perceived, he is combating the generations of negative thought and action directed towards the environment. He has shown that language can bring about an environmental change and believes it is an important tool to frame our thoughts and discourse on nature.

“An open space to move in, with the whole body, the whole mind. My gesture has been with language.”

Snyder's poems lay the groundwork for a life lived according to an ecological understanding of the Earth. In 2004, he published *Danger on Peaks,* a poetry collection that continues the theme the interconnection of all living things.

His poem "For All" puts a new spin on the takes the American Pledge of Allegiance. Instead of pledging allegiance to a flag, Snyder pledges allegiance to the land. He takes the focus off national identity and instead put it on nature. While God is mentioned in the original Pledge of Allegiance, Snyder replaces him with the sun. By doing so, he is shifting the focus from an outside deity onto a natural object. Just as God is seen as an important, life-giving power, the sun can also be seen that way-the lives of plants, animals and humans would be impossible without the light the sun provides. By replacing God with the sun, Snyder says that the ecosystem is a complete and sacred entity unto itself.

"I pledge allegiance to the soil
of Turtle Island,
and to the beings who thereon dwell
one ecosystem
in diversity
under the sun
With joyful interpenetration for all."

Snyder's another poem "Ripples on the Surface" show an interesting juxtaposition of human civilization and wilderness:

"The vast wild
The house, alone"

The little house in the wild,

the wild in the house.

Both forgotten.
No nature
Both together, one big, empty house.”

The house represents the human habitat, but Snyder places it alone in “the vast wild,” which suggests that human civilization is a small part of the word. Snyder further calls attention to this concept by reiterating and restating it in the next stanza: “the little house in the wild”. Snyder’s view of the human relationship with the natural world is very clear in the last line, in which he calls both the little house and nature “one big, empty house”. Everything-human homes and nature-make up one big ecosystem, which we all partake of and live in. he goes on to say that the house in the wild and the wild in the house have been forgotten. People have forgotten their inherent connection with nature, and do not see that they are only a part of the ecosystem. He also calls the big house of the ecosystem “empty,” which suggests that without the recognition of the connection between humans and nature, the ecosystem is “empty” because it lacks the spirit of coexistence which is necessary for it to be full.

The above two poems give a sample of Snyder’s innovative exploration of humankind’s place in nature.

I will study more American and British ecopoets and will make an attempt to refer to the other contemporary ecopoets as ecological problem is a global issue.

Chapter Plan

1. Introduction
2. Environmental and ecological issues
3. Postmodern elements in ecopoetry
4. Aesthetics of ecopoetry
5. Conclusion

Chapter Content

In the first and the second chapters, I would focus upon the in depth analysis of the term, Ecopoetry and the development of ecopoetics and will briefly introduce the ecopoets. I would also focus upon the environmental and ecological issues which have compelled writers to take up this kind of poetry.

In the third chapter, I would focus upon the characteristics of postmodern literature in ecopoetry as postmodernism questions the Enlightenment's ideas of progress, development through science and technology .Its focus was on expansion, power and control of other races, lands and culture. It talks about an unscrupulous exploitation of the unresisting subject, unfortunately nature became one of these exploited 'subjects.' Postmodernism questions these notions of advanced technological progress. Ecopoetry has benefited from this postmodernism questioning.

In the fourth chapter, I would focus upon the poetic style, tone, rhetoric and language of ecopoetry as ecopoets differ from "literary" authors because their work focuses more on scientific descriptions and speculations about nature.

In the last chapter, I would focus upon the strength, weakness and achievement of ecopoetry. My findings would focus upon the impact of ecopoetry on the human mind and their perspectives.

Research Methodology

My research methodology would consist of close reading, interpreting and in depth analysis of primary sources of both the contemporary American and British ecopoets. I will also support my study with a significant number of critical writings which deal with the subject of environmental and ecological issues. My approach will be interdisciplinary and will consult some of the scientific matter to understand the interconnectedness of human, animal, mind and nature.

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